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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR XXXX
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz reported that Israel is preserving maximum ambiguity about its intentions regarding the possibilities of tahdiya (truce) or a military operation in Gaza. Ha'aretz reported that Ahmed Yousef, an adviser to Hamas's Gaza leader Ismail Haniyeh, told the newspaper yesterday that Hamas expects a gesture from Israel because it delivered a letter from Gilad Shalit to his family. Yousef was

quoted as saying that as a gesture of goodwill, Israel could release women prisoners or minors to prove it is serious about a prisoner exchange. Last night Israel TV quoted excerpts of Shalit's letter to his family. "Dear Dad, Mom, my brother and sister, grandma and granddad and all the family. I am being treated well, although my health is very bad. I feel weakness and shortness of breath ... I ask you to do everything to return me home, otherwise it might end in tragedy. Israel must release Palestinian prisoners, because they also have families waiting for them at home, and then I will be able to come home quickly," the letter said. Maariv reported that a senior Hamas official told the newspaper that Hamas does not intend to allow the Shalit family to pass on a reply to their son. Yediot reported that residents of the "Gaza envelope" will demonstrate today in Jerusalem to demand that the government make its mind up about a truce with Hamas or a military operation in Gaza.

The Jerusalem Post reported that PM Ehud Olmert "is likely to initiate the end of his political career" today when he is expected to give the authorization necessary for a primary in Kadima to replace him. Leading media reported that PM Ehud Olmert will hold a "crucial" meeting today with Kadima MKs Tzachi Hanegbi and Eli Aflalo to determine the framework and a possible date for a Kadima party primary. The meeting follows an announcement by Likud yesterday that next Wednesday it would bring a bill before the plenum calling for the Knesset's dissolution in an effort to set a date for new elections, as early as November. Also yesterday, coalition partners Labor and Shas announced they would support a proposal for the dissolution of the Knesset. Ha'aretz reported that Labor faction head Eitan Cabel said that Kadima must replace Olmert by July. In light of these developments, calls within Kadima have intensified for a primary within the party, as a way of staving off Labor's threat to support the dissolution of the Knesset. Israel Radio reported that associates of FM Tzipi Livni stressed her determination in the matter and expressed her belief that Kadima will wilt if it does not hold primaries. Meretz announces Tuesday that unless Kadima announced this month a date in the near future for a primary, it will also support the call to dissolve the Knesset. Shas chairman and Industry and Trade Minister Eli Yishai reiterated his party's ultimatum yesterday that unless a decision is made by Wednesday to increase stipends for children, Shas will vote to dissolve the Knesset.

Maariv quoted defense sources as saying that over the past few weeks Egypt's handling of weapons smuggling from Sinai to Gaza has significantly improved. (Ha'aretz quoted Brig. Gen. Yossi Baidatz, who heads IDF Intelligence's research division, as saying that there has been some improvement in the matter. However, the newspaper quoted him as saying at the cabinet meeting: "Activity is still a drop in the sea, and the smuggling is continuing,") Ha'aretz reported that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has begun training Egyptian soldiers to locate and destroy tunnels, in an effort to improve the Egyptian army's ability to cope with arms-smuggling from Sinai to the Gaza Strip. A second, larger group of Egyptian soldiers is also due to arrive shortly for training, which is taking place at a U.S. Army base in Texas.

Electronic media quoted Palestinian sources as saying that a 9-year-old Gazan girl was killed by fire from an IDF tank east of Khan Yunis, and that soldiers shot and killed a Hamas gunman.

Yediot and Maariv reported that at Tuesday's cabinet meeting, PM Olmert expressed his concern that the next U.S. administration will be less friendly to Israel. Yediot quoted Olmert as saying that the negotiations with the Palestinians should therefore be promoted.

Ha'aretz reported that UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon offered during a meeting of the Quartet in London several weeks ago to send a multinational force to Gaza to assist the security forces answerable to Salam Fayyad's PA government to operate the Rafah, Karni, and Sufa border crossings. That way, Ban explained, the border crossings could be opened continually and fully. According to a senior Israeli diplomatic source, the plan, known as "pockets of access to Gaza," originated with Fayyad and was recently adopted by the UN chief and presented to Secretary Rice and senior Russian and EU officials. According to this plan, the multinational force sent to Gaza would operate in the "triangle" between the Rafah, Sufa, and Kerem Shalom crossings, and possibly also at Karni.

The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported on the visit to Israel of American Professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, the authors of "The Israel Lobby," which claims that AIPAC has manipulated American foreign policy. They were invited by Uri Avnery's Gush Shalom movement and will speak at a Gush Shalom forum in Tel Aviv and at the Hebrew University.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday the Association of Civil Rights in Israel charged the army with barring West Bank Palestinians from using beaches along the northern shore of the Dead Sea. A petition filed with the High Court of Justice against the IDF criticized the area's checkpoints as a means to keep Palestinians out so as not to discourage Israelis from swimming there and contributing to Jewish concessionaires.

Yediot reported that the U.S. Justice Department has not yet acceded to Israel's request for a judicial inquiry to probe the path of Morris Talansky's contributions to Olmert and Talansky's legal and financial status. Yediot cited the concert of Israeli law enforcement officers that American delays might obstruct the judicial process.

Yediot reported that the Rafael Armament Development Authority will conduct a test of the Iron Dome anti-missile system today in southern Israel. Ha'aretz quoted an Israeli security source as saying yesterday that the U.S. Defense Department is considering participating with Rafael on the Tamir rocket interceptor -- a part of the Iron Dome system. The source was quoted as saying that Israel, which is now waiting for an answer from the Americans, would like to see them cover two-thirds of the development costs. Defense officials expect it to be tested against a simulated Qassam rocket by the end of the year.

Leading media reported that yesterday Syria's Deputy FM, Faisal Mekdad, played down chances of direct talks with Israel.

Media reported that the Knesset approved yesterday a bill in first reading that exempts the state from responsibility for most damages suffered by Palestinians during and after the Intifada. The bill, dubbed Intifada Law II, is meant to circumvent a High Court of Justice ruling that unanimously overturned a similar law two years ago. The media also reported that yesterday the Knesset passed the first reading of a bill stating that people who have visited an enemy country cannot be elected to parliament. If the bill, which has extensive backing in the Knesset, becomes law, the senior members of all the Arab parties would be disqualified. Ha'aretz noted that the widespread support for the bill, which passed by a vote of 63-16, indicates that it has a good chance of becoming law by the end of the summer session -- in time to apply to contenders in the next general election. Ha'aretz quoted National Religious Party Chairman MK Zevulun Orlev, who proposed the bill along with MK Esterina Tartman (Yisrael Beiteinu), as saying: "The bill is intended to stop Trojan horses from infiltrating the Israeli Knesset." Arab MKs objected to the move. Ha'aretz quoted MK Wasal Taha (Balad - National Democratic Assembly) as saying: "This is a black day for the Knesset and for democracy. The proposal is directed against the leadership of the Arab public."

Ha'aretz reported that the Jordanian Embassy in Tel Aviv has created a web site in Hebrew, for the first time since the Hashemite Kingdom signed a peace agreement with Israel in 1994. "The purpose of the web site is to address Israeli public opinion directly, in an effort to present the way Jordan sees the situation in the region," Ambassador Ali al-Ayid told Ha'aretz yesterday. This is the only official Arab web site in Hebrew that is in regular operation. The web site, www.jordanembassytelaviv.gov.jo, is administered by embassy staff and contains a wide variety of information. Among the documents available on the site is a full translation into Hebrew of the Arab Peace Initiative as it was approved by the Arab League Summit in Beirut in 2002. The site also contains the texts of all agreements between the two countries, including the 1994 peace treaty.

Leading media reported that American entertainer Madonna intends to produce a documentary about the Arab-Israeli impasse. Ha'aretz quoted her as saying that her film would focus on children.

Yediot reported that an increasing number of gay Israeli couples are

opting to avail themselves of American surrogate mothers to create a family.

Major media cited an Israel Democracy Institute poll that found that 90% of the public believe that Israel's leadership is riddled with corruption.. Public trust in the office of prime minister was only 17%. Public support for the Supreme Court fell from 61% approval in 2007 to 49% this year. The most favored institution was the IDF, trusted by 71% of respondents.

Mideast:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: " In the twilight of his term, the Prime Minister should not attempt to take the country into another military operation. The Egyptian-sponsored cease-fire must not be delayed."

Meretz-Yahad Party Chairman Yossi Beilin wrote in Ha'aretz: "The biggest idiot in Islamic Jihad understands that Israel can wipe Gaza off the face of the earth. This realization does not require a military operation in which victory over the militias will be, at best, imperfect."

Nationalist writer Emuna Elon commented in the independent Israel Hayom: "[Don't] let the U.S., and the world that supposedly wants to help, neglect the real problems and abandon both the hungry, despairing population of Gaza and the citizens of Israel to the mercies of Hamas."

Block Quotes:

I. "No Good Reason for Gaza Op"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (6/11): "The Prime Minister's skills as a military leader were tested in the Second Lebanon War and documented in the Winograd Report. Israel paid dearly for the decision to go to war against Hizbullah in July 2006, a price that is still difficult to gage in terms of loss of deterrence.... Now on the agenda is a justified military action in Gaza. The overabundance of talk about a major operation, one that alternately approaches and recedes depending on the political predicament of members of the government, broadcasts neither strength nor deterrence, but rather indecision. There is no persuasive reason for a military action, except the fact that we cannot accept continued firing on Israel, and Hamas's continued arming. In contrast, there are a number of reasons for a cease-fire, however temporary. The main reason is that Hamas can no more be eradicated than could Hizbullah..... Indifference to the firing on the communities around the Gaza Strip is intolerable not only because of the suffering of the people there, but also because the country must not become accustomed to such blows to its sovereignty and citizens. A border means a line of defense for a country's inhabitants; otherwise it has no point..... The concern over a cease-fire with Hamas is understandable: Egypt might not protect the crossings, and Hamas will continue to grow stronger. However, Egypt might also want to prolong the calm and try to ensure that the agreement with Hamas -- which puts its prestige to the test -- will be kept to the letter. In any case, calm should be tried and its success judged with the passage of time, rather than trying war and judging its outcome after hundreds of casualties. In the twilight of his term, the Prime Minister should not attempt to take the country into another military operation. The Egyptian-sponsored cease-fire must not be delayed."

II. "A Moment before the Obvious"

Meretz-Yahad Party Chairman Yossi Beilin wrote in Ha'aretz (6/11): "In a few more days, something will apparently happen that almost no

one wants, but no one has enough courage to prevent.... [After the large-scale military operation], obviously, the decision-makers will remember that they had completely forgotten to prepare an exit plan from the Gaza Strip.... It is still possible to try to reach a cease-fire instead of the war, and to overcome the primitive thought that the cease-fire must be preceded by a major strike so as to rehabilitate deterrence.' The biggest idiot in Islamic Jihad understands that Israel can wipe Gaza off the face of the earth. This realization does not require a military operation in which victory over the militias will be, at best, imperfect."

III. "Forethought First"

Nationalist writer Emuna Elon commented in the independent Israel Hayom (6/11): "Don't you dare bring our sons back into the accursed Gaza Strip; don't you dare risk their lives with another tough military operation, with the terrible rules of engagement that you succeeded in creating; don't you dare use our children in order to prove, supposedly, something to Hamas, to public opinion, or to yourselves. Bring us back into Gaza only if you have a clear plan, for a change. Demand that our sons sacrifice their lives only if you know exactly what you will do after the cease-fire.... Don't you dare go in and fight there only to leave the moment Hamas 'surrenders' and announces, via the Egyptians, its willingness to accept Israel's conditions for a cease-fire. There is no sense in gambling with Gilad Shalit's life, there is no sense in giving Hamas an excuse to intensify, in response to the IDF's operation, the rocket fire on our communities, and there is also no sense in taking a barrage of international condemnations for harming the Palestinian population if you let terrorism make the rules once again. If, once again, you leave the majority of Gaza's residents in refugee camps, which are an infrastructure of Palestinian terrorism. If, once again, you let the U.S., and the world that supposedly wants to help, neglect the real problems and abandon both the hungry, despairing population of Gaza and the citizens of Israel to the mercies of Hamas."

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